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ABSTRACT

The Job Finding Club model originated in the early 1970's with Dr. Nathan Azrin, a behavioral psychologist and was adapted by Arthur Mills and his colleagues for use in Canada Employment Centers. Job Finding Club is a combined effort by its members to help each other find work. The Job Finding Club approach was adapted for use with older job seekers. Using behavioral techniques, the counselors created intensive and structured learning situations that provided members with the practical experience of job search. Several characteristics became evident for older workers during this pilot program. Older workers had a strong self-concept, could readily provide accurate details of the skills and abilities utilized in their past work experiences, and could identify occupational areas where they wanted to conduct their job search. They had some difficulty visualizing transferrable skills, and as a result were reluctant to search outside their past work experiences. Many indicated strong resistance to relocation. Information and permission for risk taking often had to be introduced by the counselors before members could shift into action. It has been demonstrated that the Job Finding Club approach with its emphasis on changing self-defeating behaviors while learning new job search skills enabled unemployed older workers to rejoin the labor market. (LLL)

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THE JOB FINDING CLUB PILOT PROJECT FOR OLDER WORKERS

The Job Finding Club Program is being observed in a National pilot project as an approach to aid unemployed older workers who are experiencing difficulty with their job search. The pilot has been operating since November of 1988, in fifteen urban centres across Canada. This article describes the Job Finding Club approach, and how the program was adapted for older job seekers. Data for this report was gathered by project counsellors and the staff of the Worker Development Branch, CEIC, Ottawa.

The Canadian labour market is being transformed by a number of emerging trends that will continue into the twenty-first century. Weyman, Chapman and Johnston (1989) note that into the 21st century there will be major transformations in the work force. Contributing factors will include: computerization, robotics, mergers, organizational downsizing and changes resulting from global economic activity.

An aging population and shrinking labour pool present new challenges to business and industry. "With fewer qualified people entering the labour force in the decade ahead, corporations, government agencies and community organizations must develop creative strategies for encouraging the re-employment of older workers."(Townley, 1988).

Older workers (those over 45 years of age) face particularly difficult employment problems. Generally these workers have long work histories, gathering the majority of their expertise over time, in training-on-the-job situations. Many have utilized specific skills which are not easily transferred to other occupational areas when their field of employment closes down. Most have not continued to pursue education to keep up to the labour market standard, and new technological changes in the work place increase their anxiety about changing jobs even when employment termination is imminent.

When older workers do experience job loss, their period of unemployment is likely to be a long one, with many becoming discouraged and totally withdrawing from the labour force. Rones, (1983) found the probability of an older worker giving up the job search is three times that of a younger person. Even after finding a new job, the older unemployed worker often faces additional readjustment problems (Langerman, Byerly and Root, 1982).

In November of 1988, the Minister of Employment and Immigration and the Minister of State announced increased funding and accessibility to employment programs for umemployed older workers experiencing difficulty in their job search.

A total of $500,000 was set aside to conduct Job Finding Clubs in 15 agencies across Canada.

It was anticipated that during the first year of the pilot project 1,200 workers would participate in the program. In fact, 1454 members attended between November 1988 and November 1989.

The primary objective of the pilot project is to examine whether the Job Finding Club model is an effective means of assisting older workers find

employment. The pilot has also allowed counsellors conducting the Clubs to collect and share valuable data related to characteristics of the target group.

This information has been helpful in assisting older workers with real and perceived barriers they encounter when searching for work.

The Job Finding Club model used in this project originated in the early 1970's with Dr. Nathan Azrin, a behavioural psychologist in Carbondale, Illinois. It was adapted by Arthur Mills and his collegues of the CEIC for use in Canada Employment Centres and CEIC-sponsored agencies.

Job Finding Club is a combined effort by its members to help each other find work. Using behavioural techniques, the counsellors create intensive and structured learning situations that provide members with the practical experience of job search, not just information and advice.

The goal of the Club is to assist all participants to obtain work of the highest feasible quality within the shortest feasible time.

Job seekers meet in a group of 10 - 12 members, daily for three weeks, under the supervision of a trained employment counsellor.

The Job Finding Club approach views job search as a learning experience and all members are encouraged to remain with the program until they have successfully found work. Any unsuccessful member is automatically intergrated into the next group.

The program assists the job seeker in every area that is believed to be influencing chances of obtaining a job. Motivation, maintenance of behaviour, feedback, role modeling, imitation, and practice provide members with a nuturing environment. Members actually use group time to job search and members are rarely sedentary, The approach is highly participatory. Assistance is also provided to create resumes, contact employers, develop job lead lists, conduct informational interviews and handle employment interviews.

The most important aspect of the behavioural method of counselling in the Job Finding Club is that the counsellors have a positive approach to the client. Counsellors spend most of their time telling the clients what they have been doing correctly and what progress they are making, and only secondarily, provide information (Mills, 1985).

The basic philosphy of the Job Finding Club, which is to help clients find their own jobs, goes a long way in helping to alleviate problems of the chronically unemployed. By learning more effective ways of searching for a suitable job the client can be independent in the future rather than having to rely on temporary solutions. (Mills, 1985)

Job Finding Club members must be unemployed and seeking work. They are required to have at least two occupations for which they possess the transferable skills to successfully do the work required. Members must also have no physical or emotional problems that would require immediate doctor's care. They are also asked to have their family responsibilities in order (child care, transportation). A functional literacy level is required. Members involved in the older worker project are

45 years of age and older. Membership in the Club can be made by self-referral or by agency referral.

All projects under this pilot program were monitored by the National Head-Quarters staff of the Worker Development Branch and Canadian Job Strategies Operations, CEIC, Ottawa. Projects were monitored by visits from headquarters staff and project data collected centered on qualitative feedback from both counsellors and participants.

Counsellors have been able to identify several characteristics specific to the target group from data collected from participants in the Clubs. The following is a compilation of characteristics we observed in the target group. It should be emphasized that these generalizations may not be specific to all individuals.

Several characterisitics became quite evident. Older workers have a strong self concept. They can readily provide accurate details of the skills and abilities utilized in their past work experiences. They can identify occupational areas where they want to conduct their job search. They have some difficultly in visualizing that it is possible to transfer the skills they have acquired to different work situations. As a result, they express reluctance in searching for work outside their past work experiences. Many indicate strong resistance to relocation. Information and permissions for risk taking often have to be introducted by the counsellors before members shift into action.

Initally, most members express anger, frustration or bewilderment about their job termination. Later, when they are able to examine the actual dismissal as a situational life process (Amundson, 1982) they are able to accept their feelings and move on with their job search.

Several members commented that they had known weeks and months before the terminations had occurred. They perceived they had no control over how events would happen. This submission to inevitable consequences left them with deep negative impressions. Often these members are plagued with irrational beliefs (Ellis, 1973) such as: "I expect and must prepare for the worst"; or "If my former employer doesn't want me anymore, I must be useless".

The behavioural approach used in Job Finding Club (Azrin, 1980) is based on the behaviour modification therapy theories of Skinner (1938, 1953) and is a powerful counselling intervention technique. This approach is extremely helpful to those members who exhibit "resume fixation" ("I must fix my resume until it is perfect") and those with "paper anxiety" (I can't go on until I have read, internalized and filed everything).

We observed that virtually all members possess marketable life skills such as: honesty, punctuality, dependability and consistent work out-put. They are aware of the importance employers place on these skills when screening applicants. Members demonstrate and promote these skills automatically.

At times older workers confuse past philosphies of work with present systems. Work often reflects a whole picture of their lives, not a part of the picture shared with social interaction, education, family and community. Older workers believe that the company will always take care of its employees, and that if they work hard they will always have a job and get promoted, no matter what economic conditions dictate. Sterotyping of people, affirmative action candidates and general occupations form

the basis of their assumptions. (Many times job opportunities are sabotaged because older workers place high emphasis on these assumptions.) Becoming aware of their own assumptions aids members in overcoming the confusion of the labour market.

Counsellors noted that members who had continued their education while in the labour force drew more interest from employers. Lower educational achievement, compounded by long years of service working in one type of job appeared to have a negative impact on employers. All members are encouraged to plan and obtain ongoing education that would enhance their specific occupational options. The concept of life long learning is constantly being affirmed to these members by employers in the market place.

Finally, older workers are frequently asked to discuss in detail their salary expectations, terms of work, and future career goals. Such questions are addressed in the Job Finding Club handouts and members have several opportunities to develop personal answers.

Statistical data also continues to be compiled in response to the primary objective of the pilot project.

As of January, 1990, there was a total of 1684 members in the three-week programs across Canada. The average length of time participants have been actively seeking work prior to the Job Finding Club intervention is 40 weeks. On average, the placement rate to date after this 3-week JFC intervention is 70%

The results of the pilot indicate that the Job Finding Club concept is a productive model which provides older workers with encouragement, job skills and the structure for building positive attitudes. With these skills, older workers are able to function independently and effectively in their own job search. It has been demonstrated that the Job Finding Club approach with its emphasis on changing self-defeating behaviours while learning new job search skills has enabled unemployed older workers to rejoin the labour market.

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